DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 112 995 JC 750 547

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TITLE Honors in North Central Association Community Colleges.
PUB DATE Apr 75
NOTE 8p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges (Seattle, Washington, April 13-16, 1975)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.76 HC-$1.58 Plus Postage
DESCRIPTORS Administrative Organization; Financial Support; *High Achievers; *Honors Classes; *Honors Curriculum; Independent Study; *Junior Colleges; Rural Schools; *Superior Students

ABSTRACT

In order to examine current institutional programming for the high achievement student, questionnaires were sent to 225 community colleges accredited by the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools. The survey considered the basic concerns of honors programming--organization, operations, staffing, student selection, financial support, and evaluation. Seventy-eight percent of the institutions responded., revealing that about 10 percent (25 institutions) have operationally-defined honors programs, and that nearly 50 percent (82 institutions) have some sort of provision for superior students. Honors programs occur most frequently in rural community colleges, and least frequently in newer, nontraditional suburban colleges. The administration of honors programs is usually through the academic affairs rather than the student affairs sector of the college. Although institutions reporting honors activity indicate a yearly average of four honors class sections, many institutions report "independent study" as an honors option. Honors enrollments are generally tallied by instructional departments, with a yearly mean enrollment of 45. (NHM)

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HONORS IN NORTH CENTRAL ASSOCIATION COMMUNITY COLLEGES

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During the winter of 1974-75 William Rainey Harper College undertook a study of community colleges accredited by the North Central Association in order to examine current "honors" activity, and to identify current institutional concerns for the high-achievement or superior student.

Questionnaires were sent to 225 institutions and 78% of these institutions responded. The survey considered the basic concerns of honors programming for the superior student, namely organization, operations, staffing, student selection, financial support, and evaluation. Results of the survey reveal about 10% of NCA affiliated community colleges (25 institutions) have operationally-defined programs for honors, and that nearly 50% of the institutions responding (82 institutions) have provisions of one sort or another for meeting the learning needs of superior students.

TYPE OF INSTITUTION

The survey indicates that honors programs occur most frequently in community colleges which identify themselves as "rural". "Urban" institutions, or city-centered colleges, also indicate programs have been developed for superior students. "Suburban" colleges indicate little actual formal programming, but are quick to point out that opportunities exist for gifted students. The reasons for these differences among the various types of community colleges are open to speculation. Rural schools have typically and traditionally faced a liberal arts charge, and feel it necessary to provide, however small, opportunities for the few superior

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students on campus. Such colleges are often geographically isolated, and the lack of nearby public or private institutions often necessitates this role. In the case of suburban colleges, the small amount of programming may stem from a variety of factors, but two possibilities emerge:

(1) Suburban community colleges are relatively new on the national scene, and by necessity must continue to carry the strong developmental or remedial charge provided at inception. This emphasis has resulted in a clouding of the rationale which can be made for serving the needs of superior students.

(2) Satisfactory socio-economic conditions of suburban students, combine with the high availability of adjacent senior institutions to allow many academically superior students to spend less time at community colleges and to decrease the necessity for formal programming in junior institutions.

One positive factor emerges from the data on suburban and urban institutions, however, and that is that institutions which have experienced a large increase in enrollments in the past several years have also experienced a demand from students and teachers for programs to serve the "other end" of the educational spectrum.

As might be expected, community college honors options appear more frequently at "commuter" rather than "residential" institutions. This is not surprising since American community colleges are more typically of the commuter type. There are obvious operational ramifications in the planning of honors activities which are "residence-oriented."

Institutions involved in honors typically observe a semester rather than a quarter calendar system. The reason appears to be

that more traditional institutions retain the semester schedule, and as discussed, it is the traditional type of junior college that has maintained honors options over the years.

ADMINISTRATION

The study reveals the administration of honors programs is usually found in the academic affairs rather than the student affairs sector of the community college. Although there are a few administrators identified as "director of honors," most heads of honors activities are academic deans. Several institutions report that division chairmen and/or appropriate instructional faculty provide necessary leadership. What appears significant in any consideration of honors program administration is that most colleges exhibit a wealth of diversified high achievement opportunities, and rarely are these all placed under the guidance or direction of one person. The result is a problem in administrative control in any except the most basic honors options. At the same time, however, most honors directors strongly encourage the development of options throughout (i.e. in all sectors of their colleges) even though it may mean that opportunities may ultimately only be listed on a brochure, and that the director may not have actual administrative control. The few exceptions to the "academic affairs" location of honors programs in community colleges include assignments in student personnel services and counseling centers. This no doubt owes to the testing and counseling activities that often accompany honors programming. In the same way, "student affairs" also gets the nod when honors promotion or publicity is seen in the context of other traditional student activities, from drama groups to athletics and pom-pon girls.

The titles of established programs reveal both the traditional as well as the more innovative view of honors options. One thing sure is that no title is ever detailed enough to suggest the usual set of opportunities provided. Designations appearing in community colleges provide some insight into variety and direction:

Academic Excellence; Advanced Placement; Dean's Scholars Programs; Honors English; Reading; Discovery and Challenge; Independent Study; Honors Seminar.

PARTICIPANTS

Institutions involved in honors programming report an overall enrollment mean or average student age of 26 years. The average age of students involved in honors options in these schools was slightly less than 24 years. These findings should be significant to senior institutions and those with well-developed honors options. As senior and receiving institutions, they often welcome the transfer student to upper division honors programs. With honors opportunities for an older group of students, community colleges demonstrate still another difference between themselves and senior institutions. Projected community college directions hold the exciting prospect of new honors programs serving new or heretofore unidentified learning audiences. Little has been undertaken or written about the honors or high achievement learning needs of senior citizens, returning women students, adult and continuing education learners, but the promise is clear. Whatever "honors" directions are developed for these and other audiences, they will probably resemble the more traditional programs for transfer students as well as those often newer programs for career or vocational-technical students.

INSTRUCTION

Institutions reporting honors activity reveal a yearly average of four honors class sections (specific class sections held for students admitted on a selective basis), with a range among institutions of one to seven per term, whether on a quarter or semester basis. Overall, however, provisions for independent study also play an important role in increasing the number of available honors alternatives. Many institutions which do not report formal class or section arrangements, do report "independent study" as an honors option, and this system is more frequently listed than any other type of approach. Other alternatives listed in order of greatest frequency include the following:

Conferences and Tutorials; Honors Colloquia; Invited Speakers; Starred or Designated Courses; Intern/Extern Programs.

FACULTY WORK LOAD

Problems in computing faculty work loads in honors situations centered on the number of students supervised and the amount of time utilized with each student. Problems in student evaluation were also evident, as well as in equating honors teaching assignments with regular teaching loads. Most institutions do not differentiate between regular and honors teaching assignments because most instructors assume honors tasks on a voluntary basis. There is little evidence of community college instructors being given "released time" or reduced teaching loads for working with honors students.

TRANSFER AND CAREER PROGRAMS

Honors programming exists more for transfer students rather than career or "terminal program" students. In this instance, honors programs in senior institutions seem to be models for

community college honors options and this probably owes to the fact that programs have traditionally existed in a transfer context. One may only speculate on the great potential for honors development in the career or terminal program areas because little has been written about program opportunities in this area. The clear realization that has been brought home to many community college teachers and officials in recent years is that high-achievement students also opt for career studies, and that these students also may elect to continue their formal education at senior institutions even after a career or supposedly "terminal program" is completed.

REGISTRATION

Honors enrollments in community colleges are generally tallied by instructional departments, and those institutions with programs report a yearly mean enrollment of 45. As few as 10 and as many as 300 students have participated in the yearly programs of colleges reporting in the survey.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT

The survey reveals that fiscal responsibility for honors programs is more often included in departmental budgets than in a centralized all-college budget area. But even when included in departmental budgets, honors program support is quite minimal in regular budgeted costs to the institution. Rarely is more than $1,000 expended for instructional programming labeled "honors" or any similar attributive. This relatively low amount should not be understood to be a lack of commitment to superior students. Perhaps in a specific, "named" context it is, and this may also explain, in part, why institutions are quick to say that honors programs, as such, do not exist for their students. The survey reveals that public community colleges are more involved with honors programming

than privately-supported institutions, and this fact is also underscored by a cost factor.

EVALUATION

Some system of evaluation or appraisal exists in most institutions where formal programs are in operation. Advisory committees of faculty and students are often instrumental in providing for change with respect to curricula, and this has sometimes resulted in revisions of the administrative pattern of honors development in community colleges.

SUMMARY

In all the findings of the survey it seems clear that although honors programs do not predominate in North Central Association Community Colleges, they certainly show promise, and are increasing in number. Once again, the efforts to maintain and extend comprehensive educational activities provide a sound rationale for honors students, certainly as much of a rationale as for those programs designed to meet the needs of remedial education students at the other end of the broad community college spectrum.

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